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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

AIRGRAM

REASON(S)

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TO

INFO : ISLAMABAD, MOSCOW, NEW DELHI, TEHRAN
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FROM AmEmbassy KABUL DATE April 30, 1975
B.O. 11652: GDS TAGS: PINS, PINT, P.O.V, AF
SUBJECT Status Report: "The Left" in Afghanistan
REF AmEmbassy Kabul Airgram A-33, May 22, 1973

Summary: The position of the pro-Soviet Parcham political group strengthened considerably after the July 1973 Coup that brought President Daoud to power. By early 1974, however, it appeared that the new government had a stronger nationalist than leftist bent, and some individual ranking leftists in the government were being quietly removed. This process continued throughout the year and into 1975, though the officials affected by it appeared to be those against whom charges of inefficiency or venality could be safely brought: in no case was political coloration an ostensible cause of removal, nor have any of the really important officials sometimes identified as having leftist views (including the Deputy Premier and the Minister of Interior) suffered setbacks so far. A principal factor in viewing the future of the Afghan left is Daoud's tenure in office, possibly meaning in effect his lifespan. Should he suddenly be removed from the scene we believe an opportunity would be created for leftist control; foreclosure of this possibility will depend upon Daoud's ability to create a viable political system within the time left to him. In the absence of military hostilities with Pakistan or a general economic crisis, it would appear that President Daoud and the entrenched Mohammadzai family will continue to run the country, all the while snipping away at some of the more vulnerable leftist inroads. End Summary.

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Before embarking on the update, a few obvious points should be recalled. First, the "left" in the politics of Afghanistan, still dominated by the family-clan-tribe politics of centuries past, has never been very cohesive nor even precisely definable, and if anything has become even more amorphous since the coup put an end to organized politics. Furthermore, even within the factions discussed below there are individual disagreements and animosities that probably outweigh any ideological loyalties. For example, we have recently heard reports that Deputy Prime Minister Hassan Sharq and Interior Minister Jalil Mohammad, two of the most prominent and effective officials with leftist reputations, are at loggerheads over the Pashtunistan issue, with the latter (a Pashtun) strongly backing an active Pashtunistan policy and Sharq (a non-Pashtun) resisting it. Such issues are far more realistic and immediate than any identity of views on, say, scientific socialism, which in any event can only be theoretical at Afghanistan's semi-feudal level of development.

Despite these caveats, however, the "left" here probably has more cohesion than any other trans-family grouping, with the possible exception only of the military. The proximity of the USSR and China gives it a measure of comfort and implicit protection not available to other, more moderate philosophies, and it is only common sense to assume that some of its members have been bought - or at least long-term leased - by the CPSU, KGB, or corresponding Chinese organs. These considerations are, of course, equally obvious to President Daoud.

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To our knowledge there have been no important changes in the leadership of the three major leftist factions: Parcham, Khalq (both pro-Soviet), and Sholaye-Jaweid (pro-Chinese).



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Of the three, the Parcham group remains the most significant. In fact in the first few months following the coup, there were reports that Babrak Karmal and his principal lieutenants in the Parcham group (Mir Akhbar Kaibar, Suleiman Laq and Anahita Nahida Rahebzadeh) formed a kind of subcommittee of the GOA Central Committee, which passed on all senior appointments in the GOA. During this same period, there were reported defections from the Khalq and Sholaye-Jawaid factions to the Parchamists, who clearly appeared to be coming out on top. The smaller splinter groups of leftists described in the reference airgram appear to have vanished or to have become absorbed in one of the three major groups during this period: we have heard little or nothing of them since the coup.

Among those leading GOA functionaries in the immediate post-coup period who were thought to be at least strong Parcham sympathizers if not outright members were the following:

- Deputy Prime Minister Dr. Mohammad Hassan Sharq
- Minister of Interior Faiz Mohammad
- Minister of Finance Abdul Eilah
- Minister of Border Affairs Facha Gul
- Minister of Agriculture Ghulam Jalil Babktari
- Minister of Public Works Chausuddin Faq
- Minister of Education Saymatullah Partank
- Minister of Communications Abdul Hamid Mottat

In addition a great many second echelon figures were also commonly believed to be leftists or were self-identified as such, including the Rector of Kabul University, Dr. Mohammad Haider, the Chief of the Police Intelligence Division, Faq Qatal, the commander of the elite Republican Guard, Captain Zia, and many more.

Within this same time frame (roughly until the end of 1973), the Parcham group was reported to be vetting and recruiting adherents on an unprecedented scale. There are no reliable statistics available to us in this regard (we doubt, in fact, that Mr. Babrak himself could come up with a firm figure), and there is also the question of how much of the pink in the Afghan body politic is purely surface cosmetics. Among those who first became noticeable as leftist sympathizers only in the post-coup months, the suspicion is that their coloration was more chameleonic than fast, though some, of course, might previously have concealed their true affiliations until it was safe to

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reveal them. The great question during that period was the degree to which leftists were "using" President Daoud and his regime, how much Daoud was using them, and the extent to which his and their interests may have been similar.

Daoud and the Leftists.

In the first half of 1974 there were some indications that the influence from the left might be waning. Daoud's speech to the graduates of the Polytechnic Institute (Built and at least partially run with Soviet aid) on February 28, 1974 was more than simply nationalistic. The headline of the newspaper article covering the speech was "National Interests Above Every Thought, Ideology." and Daoud drove home the point further by stating "we have no connection with any group and linking us to any group or movement is a sin." Granted that these are only short quotes in a speech otherwise devoted to alla for patriotic sacrifices, and granted that the second quote has an almost defensive ring to it, but in the same speech (although not in the published version) Daoud also openly threatened leftists with castration according to an informed source. It was interpreted at the time as a significant departure from what had been discerned as a strong leftist trend.

Shortly there after, Minister of Tribal Affairs Pacha Gul was sent off to Bulgaria as Ambassador. Minister of Communications Mohtat was also removed. By the end of the summer of 1974 rumors were floating to the surface of impending crackdown on Communists in the GOA and wholesale cabinet changes. To date these have not materialized, but there have been a number of further individual changes in the GOA at various levels, most of which appear to have eroded leftist strength: the removal of Minister of Education Pazwak, as well as that of his uncle, previously in charge of Helmand Province: the ousting of the Rector of Kabul University, Dr. Haider; and most recently some rumblings that the police may be moving to eliminate some leftist and preventing "politically committed" candidates from entering the force. In April of 1975 the former "Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation" was stripped of the second of its designations, leaving its leftist minister with a considerably reduced bailiwick. Some leftist military officers reportedly are also being quietly replaced in the elite Republican Guard by Mohammadzai family members, though Captain (now Major) Zia retains command.

The leftists and Daoud

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Lending credence to reports of a decline in Parchamist fortunes is a report that the Khalq group sent a letter to President Daoud in the last weeks of 1974, volunteering to provide honest officials to replace the corrupt Parchamists who had wormed their way into office. There was no indication that the letter was answered, nor that the advice was heeded, but it is probably significant that the Parcham-Khalq conflict, largely submerged during the ascendancy of the former's fortunes right after the coup, has now re-emerged. It is unlikely that Daoud would overlook this split and fail to exploit it within his own plan for Afghan political development.

As for the Sholaye-Jaweid, there has been no explicit voicing of anti-leftist sentiment. On the contrary, in foreign affairs (when voting at the U.N., etc.) and in domestic news coverage of foreign issues, the Afghan message is definitely the "Third World" position on the Soviet side of pure neutrality. While Daoud's domestic "platform" might be described as "populist" and includes calls for land reform educational parity, he publicly eschews socialism and carries the banner of un-reconstructed Islam during all his public speeches. Those

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As for the Sholaye-Jawid, there has been no solid reporting on its activities (if any), though it is rumored to have had a hand in some anti-regime "night letters" that supposedly circulated in late 1974. (We have not seen any of these surreptitiously distributed flyers, but they are a time-honored method of registering political dissent in Afghanistan.)

Daoud's Public "Pro-Left" Posture.

Throughout all of this, of course there has been no explicit avowal of anti-leftist sentiment. On the contrary, in foreign affairs (e.g., voting at the U.N., etc.) and in domestic news coverage of foreign issues, the Afghan message is definitely the "Third World" position on the Soviet side of pure neutrality. While Daoud's domestic "platform" might be described as "populist" and includes calls for land reform, educational parity, he publicly eschews socialism and carries the banner of un-reconstructed Islam during all his public speeches. Those

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Leftist officials who have been fired have never had their ideological beliefs thrown up as a reason for dismissal, but only their corruption or inefficiency. And in all likelihood the latter charges have been justified; traditionally the Afghan politico-economic machine has only been able to operate with liberal doses of the oil of corruption, and a charge of inefficiency, supportable against most bureaucrats of most societies, is in few places safer than Afghanistan.

Possibly because of this, interpretations of the dismissals have varied. The anti-left optimists see in this a definite swing away from Soviet influence and towards greater western influence. At the other end of the spectrum a small group of pessimists see Daoud as the biggest Parchamist of all, who may indeed have purged some of the inefficient leftists or those posing a threat to him personally, but who is responsible for the continuance if not the very existence of the Parcham Party and will eventually deliver the country into Soviet hands. Leftists who have been sent to relatively minor provincial posts, according to the gloom, are there only to insure that the communist message is spread in the backwards, conservative parts of the country.

Embassy Views.

While nothing is entirely impossible at this juncture in Afghan politics, we believe it most likely that Daoud, having used the left to gain power, is now methodically and cautiously trying to whittle it down. This is in keeping with what appears to be his policy of decapitating any institution which dilutes his power or denigrating any individual who appears too strong. By choosing as targets those who in fact have a reputation for ineptitude or veracity, he is snipping away some of the left's strength without leaving himself open to charges of discrimination against it.

Perhaps the key question is the political coloration of those who have replaced the ousted. The prime requirement appears to be Daoud's perception of the individual's personal loyalty quotient, and indeed that may even be where the matter stops. We have not discerned any clear political pattern among the replacements for ousted officials.

It must be emphasized that in removing the likes of the Pazhwaks and Pacha Gul, Daoud has scarcely emasculated the left. If reputed leftists Hissan Sharq, Major Zia, and Faiz Mohammad retain their positions, along with a host of their

reported adherents of lesser standing, leftist influence is alive and well. If the current trend continues, however, in the end even these stalwarts may find themselves isolated and picked off. We would foresee this as a quite lengthy process, and one that could reverse at any time. Furthermore, a swing away from the left internally does not necessarily mean a more accommodating posture of Afghanistan in external affairs or even positive change in relations with the United States; if anything, a crackdown on leftists at home might make support for Soviet positions abroad a useful political trade-off.

Prospects for the Left.

In looking toward its future the Afghan left must contend with an entrenched autocrat who does not brook competition, and with a large interlocking First Family (the Mohammadzai's) whose members occupy strategic positions throughout the power structure and are unlikely to relinquish their economic and social perquisites. To complete the interlock, the autocrat is himself a Mohammadzai, a member of the family.

Offsetting this disadvantage are the advantages of geographical proximity to the Soviet Union and the fact that no Afghan government can afford to antagonize the USSR by persecuting pro-Soviet communists too openly. Relatively voluginous exchange programs, including a large Soviet training program for Afghan military officers, have provided the access necessary to recruit new adherents directly.

A principal factor in the extent to which opportunity will be presented to the Afghan left derives from the tenure of President Daoud and the circumstances of his departure.

The President has promised a new constitution and a political party. We are dubious that the first will be a realistic or workable document acceptable to a large Afghan consensus and capable of guiding Afghanistan through such a great domestic crisis as succession, just as we are dubious that the Daoud-created "political party" is likely to become a viable and ongoing political institution as opposed to a mechanism for temporary rule by the Party's creator himself. The duration of Daoud's continuance in power following creation of these institutions, however, will be of significance; the longer he has to nurture them the greater the possibility of their viability.

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In the event of Daoud's sudden demise we believe there could be great scope for leftist activity. One of its opposing forces might be the Afghan military, although the Soviet orientation of that group could turn it into an instrument of leftist-nationalist or out-and-out Soviet policy. Another opposing force today would be the Mohammadzai clan in all its ramifications, a group to the extent we can discover permeated neither by leftist ideology nor pro-Soviet leanings. Still, we readily admit that this Mohammadzai bulwark is not an immutable force in Afghan society.

We believe there are two other factors which might influence leftist possibilities for entering Afghan politics in ways which would give that group overweening influence: Should, for whatever reason, the Afghan economy degenerate to the point of causing widespread tribal or urban unrest then we believe this would offer new approaches to power for leftist leaders; and should Afghanistan's relations with Pakistan degenerate to the point of military hostilities, Afghanistan's traditional careful balancing act between various world powers would be thrown askew, both by its reliance on an increased flow of Soviet military hardware and by the necessity of rerouting trade to a large extent via the USSR.

For the time being, however, the balance between the presiding autocrat and his family on one hand, and the leftist forces on the other, seems if anything to be to the disadvantage of the latter.

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 REF : AmEmbassy Kabul Airgram A-33, May 22, 1973

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Introduction.

The referenced airgram gives a comprehensive background on the Afghan left; the purpose of this report is to bring it up to date through the turbulent two years that have intervened. Because the basic spadework has already been done, and because conventional political activity (in the Western sense) has been banned since the July 1973 Coup, this report will be both briefer and to some extent more speculative than its predecessor. Hard information on internal politics is difficult to come by in a society which has retreated from even the first modest steps towards constitutional government.

Before embarking on the update, a few obvious points should be recalled. First, the "left" in the politics of Afghanistan, still dominated by the family-clan-tribe politics of centuries past, has never been very cohesive nor even precisely definable, and if anything has become even more amorphous since the coup put an end to organized politics. Furthermore, even within the factions discussed below there are individual disagreements and animosities that probably outweigh any ideological loyalties. For example, we have recently heard reports that Deputy Prime Minister Hassan Sharq and Interior Minister Faiz Mohammad, two of the most prominent and effective officials with leftist reputations, are at loggerheads over the Pashtunistan issue, with the latter (a Pashtun) strongly backing an active Pashtunistan policy and Sharq (a non-Pashtun) resisting it. Such issues are far more realistic and immediate than any identity of views on, say, scientific socialism, which in any event can only be theoretical at Afghanistan's semi-feudal level of development.

Despite these caveats, however, the "left" here probably has more cohesion than any other trans-family grouping, with the possible exception only of the military. The proximity of the USSR and China gives it a measure of comfort and implicit protection not available to other, more moderate philosophies, and it is only common sense to assume that some of its members have been bought - or at least long-term leased - by the CPSU, KGB, or corresponding Chinese organs. These considerations are, of course, equally obvious to President Daoud.

Structure and Organization.

To our knowledge there have been no important changes in the leadership of the three major leftist factions: Parchan, Khalq (both pro-Soviet), and Sholaye-Jaweid (pro-Chinese).

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Within this same time frame (roughly until the end of 1973), the Parcham group was reported to be vetting and recruiting adherents on an unprecedented scale. There are no reliable statistics available to us in this regard.

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Daoud and the Leftists.

In the first half of 1974 there were some indications that the influence from the left might be waning. Daoud's speech to the graduates of the Polytechnic Institute (built and at least partially run with Soviet aid) on February 28, 1974 was more than simply nationalistic. The headline of the newspaper article covering the speech was "National Interests Above Every Thought, Ideology," and Daoud drove home the point further by stating "we have no connection with any group, and linking us to any group or movement is a sin." Granted that these are only two short quotes in a speech otherwise devoted to calls for patriotic sacrifices, and granted that the second quote has an almost defensive ring to it, but in the same speech (although not in the published version) Daoud also openly threatened leftists with castration according to an informed source. It was interpreted at the time as a significant departure from what had been discerned as a strong leftist trend.

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Embassy Views.

While nothing is entirely impossible at this juncture in Afghan politics, we believe it most likely that Daoud, having used the left to gain power, is now methodically and cautiously trying to whittle it down. This is in keeping with what appears to be his policy of decapitating any institution which dilutes his power or denigrating any individual who appears too strong. By choosing as targets those who in fact have a reputation for ineptitude or venality, he is snipping away some of the left's strength without leaving himself open to charges of discrimination against it.

Perhaps the key question is the political coloration of those who have replaced the ousted. The prime requirement appears to be Daoud's perception of the individual's personal loyalty quotient, and indeed that may even be where the matter stops. We have not discerned any clear political pattern among the replacements for ousted officials.

It must be emphasized that in removing the likes of the Pazhwaks and Pacha Gul, Daoud has scarcely emasculated the left. If reputed leftists Hassan Sharq, Major Zia, and Faiz Mohammad retain their positions, along with a host of their

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reported adherents of lesser standing, leftist influence is alive and well. If the current trend continues, however, in the end even these stalwarts may find themselves isolated and picked off. We would foresee this as a quite lengthy process, and one that could reverse at any time. Furthermore, a swing away from the left internally does not necessarily mean a more accommodating posture of Afghanistan in external affairs or even positive change in relations with the United States; if anything, a crackdown on leftists at home might make support for Soviet positions abroad a useful political trade-off.

Prospects for the Left.

In looking toward its future the Afghan left must contend with an entrenched autocrat who does not brook competition, and with a large interlocking First Family (the Mohammadzai's) whose members occupy strategic positions throughout the power structure and are unlikely to relinquish their economic and social perquisites. To complete the interlock, the autocrat is himself a Mohammadzai, a member of the family.

Offsetting this disadvantage are the advantages of geographical proximity to the Soviet Union and the fact that no Afghan government can afford to antagonize the USSR by persecuting pro-Soviet communists too openly. Relatively voluminous exchange programs, including a large Soviet training program for Afghan military officers, have provided the access necessary to recruit new adherents directly.

A principal factor in the extent to which opportunity will be presented to the Afghan left derives from the tenure of President Daoud and the circumstances of his departure.

The President has promised a new constitution and a political party. We are dubious that the first will be a realistic or workable document acceptable to a large Afghan consensus and capable of guiding Afghanistan through such a great domestic crisis as succession, just as we are dubious that the Daoud-created "political party" is likely to become a viable and ongoing political institution as opposed to a mechanism for temporary rule by the Party's creator himself. The duration of Daoud's continuance in power following creation of these institutions, however, will be of significance; the longer he has to nurture them the greater the possibility of their viability.

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In the event of Daoud's sudden demise we believe there could be great scope for leftist activity. One of its opposing forces might be the Afghan military, although the Soviet orientation of that group could turn it into an instrument of leftist-nationalist or out-and-out Soviet policy. Another opposing force today would be the Mohammadzai clan in all its ramifications, a group to the extent we can discover permeated neither by leftist ideology nor pro-Soviet leanings. Still, we readily admit that this Mohammadzai bulwark is not an immutable force in Afghan society.

We believe there are two other factors which might influence leftist possibilities for entering Afghan politics in ways which would give that group overweening influence: Should, for whatever reason, the Afghan economy degenerate to the point of causing widespread tribal or urban unrest then we believe this would offer new approaches to power for leftist leaders; and should Afghanistan's relations with Pakistan degenerate to the point of military hostilities, Afghanistan's traditional careful balancing act between various world powers would be thrown askew, both by its reliance on an increased flow of Soviet military hardware and by the necessity of rerouting trade to a large extent via the USSR.

For the time being, however, the balance between the presiding autocrat and his family on one hand, and the leftist forces on the other, seems if anything to be to the disadvantage of the latter.

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